

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable reconsideration of this application as presently amended and in light of the following discussion is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-41, 43-100, and 102-109 are pending in the present application. Claims 1-3, 6, 11-13, 16, 25, 26, 30, 34-36, 43, 44, 46, 50-58, 67-70, 73, 78-83, 92-96, 102, 103, and 109 are amended by the present amendment.

In the outstanding Office Action, Claim 25 was objected to; Claims 1-41, 43-100, and 102-109 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as anticipated by Sawada (U.S. Patent No. 6,141,507); and Claims 1-41, 43-100, and 102-109 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over Fairchild et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,343,320, herein "Fairchild") in view of Fan et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,310,692, herein "Fan").

Applicants thank the examiner for the courtesy of an interview extended to Applicants' representative on May 24, 2006. During the interview, the differences between the claims and the applied art were discussed. Further, proposed claim amendments clarifying the claims over the applied art were discussed. The present response sets forth those discussed claim amendments. The examiner indicated that the discussed claim amendments appear to distinguish over the applied art. Arguments presented during the interview are reiterated below.

Regarding the objection to Claim 25, Claim 25 has been amended as suggested by the outstanding Office Action and without adding new matter. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested this objection be withdrawn.

Regarding the rejection of Claims 1-41, 43-100, and 102-109 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as anticipated by Sawada, independent Claims 1, 11, 25, 26, 30, 34, 43, 50, 51, 55, 67, 68, 78, 92, 93, 102, and 109 have been amended to recite that a set of at least two apparatuses are selected, based on corresponding service information, from a plurality of

apparatuses that require service as at least an image forming apparatus. The claim amendments find support, for example, in the specification at page 22, line 3 to page 23, line 14. No new matter has been added.

Briefly recapitulating, independent Claim 1 is directed to a remote control system configured to control a plurality of apparatuses divided into a predetermined number of groups including at least an image forming apparatus. A central control system includes a computer unit that receives service information from the at least an image forming apparatus and remotely controls the plurality of apparatuses based on the service information. An information collecting unit collects corresponding service information from other image forming apparatuses including in a same group as the at least an image forming apparatus when the service information of the at least an image forming apparatus is received by the central control system. The computer unit is also configured to select, based on the corresponding service information, a set of at least two apparatuses that require service as the at least an image forming apparatus. Independent Claims 11, 25, 26, 30, 34, 43, 50, 51, 55, 67, 68, 78, 92, 93, 102, and 109 have been amended similar to independent Claim 1.

In other words, the system of Claim 1 receives service information from at least an image forming apparatus and then collects corresponding service information from apparatuses included in a same group as the at least an image forming apparatus. Based on the collected information, the computer unit of the system selects a set of at least two apparatuses from the plurality of apparatuses that require service as the at least an image forming apparatus. Thus, only a person is sent to provide the service required by the at least an image forming apparatus and the selected apparatuses instead of sending multiple persons.

Accordingly, the remote control system of Claims 1, 11, 25, 26, 30, 34, 43, 50, 51, 55, 67, 68, 78, 92, 93, 102, and 109 advantageously allows a service engineer to provide service to multiple apparatuses, and to increase the efficiency of maintenance service while reducing

the cost of service operations as described in the specification at page 22, line 3, to page 24, line 13.

Turning to the applied art, Sawada discloses a service system that includes a plurality of image forming apparatuses. When an abnormal or pre-abnormal phenomenon or similar factor occurs in one image forming apparatus, each image forming apparatus of the system adds information relating to its operation that is sent to a central control unit. In other words, Sawada discloses that when one device reports abnormal factors, all the other devices add their information to that abnormal factor and information about all the devices (the abnormal working device and the normal working devices) is sent to the control system.

However, this method is different from the operation of the claimed remote control system which receives service information from at least an image forming apparatus, collects corresponding service information from other image forming apparatuses included in the same group as the at least an image forming apparatus, and selects based on the corresponding information a set of at least two apparatuses from the plurality of apparatuses that require service as the at least an image forming apparatus. Applicants note that the system of Sawada does not teach or suggest selecting a set of at least two apparatuses that require service as the abnormal working apparatus.

Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that independent Claims 1, 11, 25, 26, 30, 34, 43, 50, 51, 55, 67, 68, 78, 92, 93, 102, and 109 and each of the claims dependent therefrom patentably distinguish over Sawada.

The rejection of Claims 1-41, 43-100, and 102-109 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as unpatentable over Fairchild in view of Fan is respectfully traversed for the following reasons.

Neither Fairchild nor Fan teaches or suggests a central control system having at least a computer unit that receives service information from at least an image forming apparatus, an information collection unit that collects corresponding service information from other image

forming apparatuses included in a same group as the at least an image forming apparatus when the service information of the at least an image forming apparatus is received, and the computer unit selecting, based on the corresponding service information, a set of at least two apparatuses from the plurality of apparatuses that require service as the at least an image forming apparatus as required by amended Claims 1, 11, 25, 26, 30, 34, 43, 50, 51, 55, 67, 68, 78, 92, 93, 102, and 109.

Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that independent Claims 1, 11, 25, 26, 30, 34, 43, 50, 51, 55, 67, 68, 78, 92, 93, 102, and 109 and each of the claims depending therefrom patentably distinguish over Fairchild and Fan, either alone or in combination.

During the interview the examiner suggested that Sekizawa (U.S. Patent No. 6,430,711 B1) might be relevant to the amended claims. Thus, Sekizawa is discussed next.

Sekizawa is directed to a method in which an agent unit 10 collects status information of a plurality of network printers P, which are connected to a LAN 3, and the agent unit 10 sends all the information to a console unit 20 at the same time. The console unit 20 has a function of receiving information and tabulating the received information as specifically disclosed by Sekizawa at column 43, line 27 to column 44, line 10.

On the contrary, in the claimed system, when the central processing unit receives service information from an image forming apparatus, the central processing unit collects the service information from other image forming apparatuses belonging to the same group to which the image forming apparatus sending the service information belongs, which is different from the method of Sekizawa.

Consequently, in light of the above discussion and in view of the present amendment, the present application is believed to be in condition for allowance and an early and favorable action to that effect is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

OBLON, SPIVAK, McCLELLAND,  
MAIER & NEUSTADT, P.C.



Customer Number

22850

Tel: (703) 413-3000  
Fax: (703) 413 -2220  
(OSMMN 03/06)

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Gregory J. Maier  
Attorney of Record  
Registration No. 25,599  
Remus F. Fetea, Ph.D.  
Limited Recognition No. L0037